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*Do you want to write
a letter to the Editor*

Rogue Elephants at Large

If the Central Intelligence Agency can punish former agents who break its rules against disclosing secrets learned on the job, why can't it do something about former spies who train foreign terrorists? The question becomes more compelling with each revelation about the exploits of Edwin Wilson and Frank Terpil. These former agents, currently fugitives from gun-running charges, have exploited their service-connected skills and credentials in the cause of terrorists like Idi Amin and Colonel Qaddafi.

Wilson and Terpil have become central figures of The Times's continuing reports about the unauthorized transfer overseas of America's advanced technology, weapons and expertise. For all their resemblance to fictional spy stories, these tales depict an alarming lack of control over lawless action, sometimes taken in the nation's name. Fortunately, Congress and some parts of the executive branch are beginning to show concern.

The reaction was swift enough three years ago when Frank Snepp, a C.I.A. official at the end of the Vietnam war, published a book about his experiences without clearing the manuscript. The Justice Department sued him for every cent the book earned and the Supreme Court upheld this method of holding former agents to their oaths of secrecy.

No such contract clause seems to prevent the C.I.A.'s alumni from exploiting their knowledge to recruit Green Berets to train guerrillas in Libya, or enlisting Government contractors in their schemes. Criminal laws prohibit sneaking military equipment

and technological expertise out of the country, but there seem to have been no safeguards preventing people from being gulled into thinking the Government secretly approved such activity.

Wilson and Terpil may be the worst examples of the "retired" hired gun. Yet they are undeniably a product of their professional world, exploiting what it teaches about covert operations and disguised affiliations. Business firms and Government officials are said to have been led — or willing to be misled — into believing that they were still on official business. And there appears to have been no way for any suspicious person to check on them.

It is one thing to countenance undercover dealings that the C.I.A. deems, even misguidedly, to be in the national interest. It is quite another to tolerate activities that directly aid despised regimes. The C.I.A. as rogue elephant is bad enough, but what protections does it offer against purported C.I.A. activity that it opposes?

Writing rules that curb the Wilsons and Terpils may prove more difficult than drafting censorship contracts. It may also be far less appealing to an Administration that wants in fact to lift the restraints on intelligence operations. But if Government fails to prevent such free-wheeling sabotage of its foreign policy and to deny such operatives their connections, the world can only conclude that they acted with official sanction.

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